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USING FLEXIBLE DETERRENT OPTIONS TO COUNTER ADVERSARIAL PROPAGANDA

by

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A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

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## **ABSTRACT**

Given the complexities of our national government and the current international environment, the role of the Unified Command has changed dramatically. Increasingly, the U.S. military is being pulled into Military Operations Other Than War (MOOTW). As a result the geographic Combatant Commander is finding that synchronization among the national instruments of power within the AOR has become as important as synchronization on the battlefield. One area that the United States appears to be struggling with is how to counter adversarial propaganda effectively. Planning for and implementation of Flexible Deterrent Options (FDOs) may offer the Combatant Commander an opportunity to more effectively shape his theater environment.

This paper will briefly examine how propaganda might be delivered to a target audience in order to illustrate why the geographic Combatant Commander needs to develop options other than psychological operations to counter adversarial propaganda. The geographic Combatant Commander's theater strategy planning will then be analyzed and recommendations developed for FDOs which address the threat posed by anti-U.S. propaganda campaigns.

“The prudent use of military force, in concert with the economic, political, and diplomatic instruments of national power, is a central aspect of U.S. efforts to shape the international environment and to encourage stability wherever vital interests are at stake. By remaining engaged, the United States is able to exert its influence to prevent crises from escalating, deter major wars, and help avoid the tragedies and conflicts that marred the twentieth century.”<sup>1</sup>

## **Introduction**

Given the complexities of our national government and the current international environment, the role of the Combatant Commander has changed dramatically. Increasingly, the United States (U.S.) military is being pulled into Military Operations Other Than War (MOOTW). As a result the geographic Combatant Commander is finding that synchronization among the national instruments of power within the Area of Responsibility (AOR) has become as important as synchronization on the battlefield.

The theater security environment has also changed dramatically because of globalization and the end of the Cold War. State and non-state actors are connected in unprecedented ways: the lightening speed of information transfer around the world (e.g. CNN, Internet); dependence on common international critical information infrastructures (e.g. commercial satellites, fiber optic cable routes); economic interdependencies (e.g. multi-national corporations, trade agreements, financial networks); and the international impact of environmental and demographic issues (e.g. global warming, AIDs, water). Technological advancements and concurrent societal changes, however, will not be available to all resulting in organized crime, terrorists, and failing/rogue nations remaining the “wildcard” in the security equation. The National Security Strategy (NSS) states that:

“The unparalleled strength of the United States armed forces, and their forward presence, have maintained the peace in some of the world’s most strategically vital regions. However, the threats and enemies we must confront have changed, and so must our forces. A military structured to deter massive Cold War-era armies must be transformed to focus more on how an adversary might fight rather than where and when a war might occur.”<sup>2</sup>

In addressing how an adversary might fight, one cannot ignore the power of adversarial propaganda and the need to counter its effect within a geographic Combatant Commander’s AOR. To do so requires a profound understanding of the adversary’s beliefs, message, and delivery mechanism. As noted in Joint Pub 3-0, Doctrine for Joint Operations:

“Regional challenges will often involve an adversary whose system of beliefs is fundamentally different to include core beliefs such as right and wrong, the value of human life, and the concept of victory and defeat. What appears to be irrational or fanatical to US forces may be completely rational to multinational partners or opponents.”<sup>3</sup>

The geographic Combatant Commander must be able to recognize and effectively counter the threat posed by these divergent factors and the application of adversarial anti-U.S. propaganda within the AOR and international community.

Flexible Deterrent Options (FDOs) provide the geographic Combatant Commander an opportunity to shape his theater environment using the full range of U.S. national tools of power in concert with a theater engagement strategy. These include diplomatic, information, military and economic activities. There are limitations to their use under the current planning and execution processes and these limitations will be discussed later. However, concerted efforts to plan for and develop FDOs to counter adversarial propaganda are critical to reducing the threat to U.S. forces, enhancing U.S.

credibility, and establishing and sustaining the support of host nations and the international community.

This paper will briefly examine how propaganda might be delivered to a target audience in order to illustrate why the geographic Combatant Commander needs to develop options other than psychological operations to counter adversarial propaganda. The geographic Combatant Commander's theater strategy planning will then be analyzed and recommendations developed for FDOs which address the threat posed by anti-U.S. propaganda campaigns.

## **Propaganda Unleashed**

There is a tendency when discussing propaganda to focus in on the psychological operations waged during war. Images of leaflets dropping, music blaring outside compounds, food packets falling from the sky, and manipulation of television, video, and sound bites immediately come to mind.

This is not the type of propaganda to be addressed here. Rather, it is to look within an AOR and determine the sources of and reasons for anti-U.S. sentiments and to determine which can be addressed by an application of FDOs.

To be effective, propaganda is usually presented to the populace through apparently neutral channels which include, but are not limited to, government agencies, scientific research, news, education venues, and/or entertainment mediums. It is designed "to win over the public for special interests through a massive orchestration of attractive [in

the mind of the receiver] conclusions packaged to conceal both their persuasive purpose and lack of sound supporting reasons.”<sup>4</sup> It may also be used to sell an ideology or image which supports an action or policy.<sup>5</sup>

The Hizbollah movement illustrates an effective propaganda campaign which involves the orchestration of a number of propaganda channels. In the 1990s, Hizbollah grew as a “military” force as well as a benefactor to Lebanon’s population by providing extensive social, educational, health and welfare services which were not being provided by the state. These ran the gamut from providing free health care through a network of hospitals, infirmaries, pharmacies and dental clinics; rebuilding structures damaged by Israeli attacks; building homes and shelters; constructing water systems; to providing loans for marriages, schools and small business ventures. These actions established Hizbollah as more than a terrorist group, at least in the eyes of the Lebanon populace.<sup>6</sup> This popular base allowed Hizbollah to eventually establish itself as a political entity and win seats in the Lebanese parliament.<sup>7</sup> Its popularity also provides Hizbollah the capability to use both state and non-state actors for surveillance and communications interception to plan and execute operations; recruit suicide bombers by selling the concept of martyrdom; and, establish an effective counterintelligence system. Israeli efforts in

the 1990s to eliminate Hizbollah by mounting large scale attacks into Lebanon backfired and resulted instead in strengthening Hizbollah's reputation, gaining international sympathy, and legitimizing Hizbollah military operations as acts of resistance vice terrorism.<sup>8</sup>

Hizbollah has shown its effectiveness at winning the hearts and minds of its target audience. In doing so, it also gained support from the international community. Little is done in a vacuum anymore and it is important to understand that non-state actors and comparatively weak nation-states are gaining influence and power on the world stage. To counter this influence, the geographic Combatant Commander has "lessons to be learned" about developing an effective, multi-faceted, interagency campaign to counter anti-U.S. propaganda through a number of venues and activities and to be prepared to respond to the intended and unintended consequences of military action. Arguably this crosses the line between military action and foreign policy, however, the fact that the military is increasingly involved in MOOTW requires a change in thinking and U.S. responses. Jennifer Hickey noted that:

"Winning the military war and losing the war of words, or failing effectively to rebut misconceptions about the United States and its policies, can have damaging long-term effects. Iraq provides a case in point. A 1998 report issued by the U.S. Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy determined that while coalition forces won the first battle – the gulf war itself – Saddam Hussein was victorious in the long run. After blocking U.N. inspectors from determining the state of Iraq's weapons capabilities, Saddam fought back. The report says Saddam –



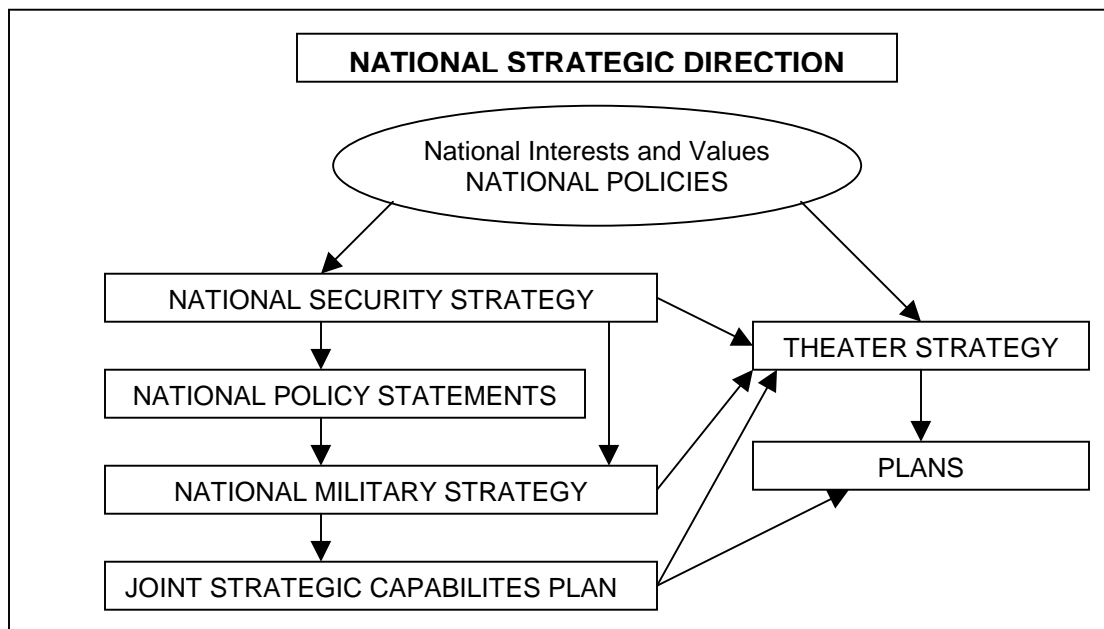
beaten in 1991 – had by 1998 ‘embarked in a concerted campaign to divert world media attention from his weapons to images of sick and hungry Iraqi children.’

How successful was the campaign? Three years later, in an interview with Qatar-based al-Jazeera television, U.S. National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice actually had to explain the reasons for continuing sanctions on Iraq, at last challenging the Iraqi propaganda that Saddam’s regime, not U.S. sanctions, were responsible for the continuing distress of Iraq’s people.”<sup>9</sup>

Two years later, the U.S. Central Command was again fully engaged in Iraq and dealing with the effects of Saddam’s propaganda campaigns on his populace, the Arab world, and the international community at large.

## Planning Considerations

Despite assertions to the contrary, military planning is not done in isolation. Figure 1



**Figure 1: National Strategic Direction<sup>10</sup>**

illustrates the linkage between national strategies/policies and the development of the

geographic Combatant Commanders' theater strategy and plans.

While these will not be discussed in detail, they are included to show that the theater strategy is based on national interests and values which have been promulgated to the geographic Combatant Commander through the National Security Strategy, national policy statements (e.g. Presidential Decision Directives), and the National Military Strategy. The Joint Strategic Capabilities Plan (JSCP) provides guidance on geographic Combatant Commands' priorities "to accomplish assigned tasks and requirements for planning within theaters and regions."<sup>11</sup> Traditional missions of the geographic Combatant Commands include fostering regional stability; countering regional threats involving weapons of mass destruction; deterring and defeating aggression against U.S., Allies, friends and interests; deterring and defeating attacks on the U.S.; providing humanitarian and disaster relief at home and abroad; protecting the lives of U.S. citizens in foreign locations; deterring and countering state-sponsored and other terrorism; and, countering the production and trafficking in illegal drugs.<sup>12</sup> With these missions in mind, and any additional tasking incorporated, the geographic Combatant Commanders' planning staffs develop the theater strategy. The theater strategy elements include the geographic Combatant Commander's vision and intent; direction for campaign planning; military operations concepts incorporating all the elements of national power; FDOs; support to multinational

interests; protection of Allied interests; and, conflict resolution definition.<sup>13</sup> Traditional military engagement activities include “security assistance and international military education and training, multilateral and bilateral exchange programs, joint military exercises, technology and information exchanges, as well as professional reciprocal visits from the highest levels of the force structure to small unit and individual technical and professional exchanges.”<sup>14</sup>

The JSCP directs the geographic Combatant Commander to develop FDO plans which combine “military forces and resources with diplomatic, informational, and economic actions by non-DOD agencies.”<sup>15</sup> Under current planning guidance, FDOs are “preplanned rapidly executable actions initiated before and after unambiguous warning that seek to preempt, defuse, or deter a potential threat to U.S. interests.”<sup>16</sup> For FDOs to be effective, they must be credible; based on in-depth regional knowledge; comply with international law; integrate the full-range of interagency expertise and capabilities; and, work towards a well-understood endstate.<sup>17</sup>

Joint Pub 3-08, Interagency Coordination during Joint Operations, Vol I., provides geographic Combatant Commands’ planning staffs with the framework for coordinating interagency objectives and actions. This same framework is useful in the development of FDOs to counter adversarial propaganda. The steps include: identifying all agencies and organizations which should be involved; establishing an interagency hierarchy and defining objectives; defining theater military and agency courses of actions; clarifying

the role of each participant; identifying potential obstacles resulting from different organizational priorities; identifying responsibility for resources involved; and, defining the desired end state and exit criteria.<sup>18</sup> Identification of all agencies and organizations which should be involved is problematic. Historically, the Department of State, with its foreign policy role, would be expected to be the primary U.S. agency dealing with foreign issues. However, the exponential development of multilateral international agencies has increased the role of other U.S. Government (USG) agencies/organizations in international affairs. For example, the Department of Agriculture deals with the Food and Agriculture Organization, the U.S. Public Health Service deals with the World Health Organization, and the Agency for International Development (AID) has a more visible presence than the Department of State in some countries.<sup>19</sup> That said, however, Joint Pub 3-08, Interagency Coordination during Joint Operations, Vol. II, provides the geographic Combatant Commands' planning staffs with a comprehensive list of the capabilities and core competencies of key U.S. government agencies, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), private voluntary organizations (PVOs), and regional and international organizations. It also includes interagency

points of contact with telephone and facsimile number listings. It is key to remember that:

“Within the theater, the geographic combatant commander is the focal point for planning and implementation of regional military strategies that require interagency coordination. Coordination between the Department of Defense and other USG agencies may occur through a country team or within a combatant command. In some operations, a Special Representative of the president or Special Envoy of the United Nations Secretary-General may be involved. The US interagency structure within foreign countries involves the Ambassador, country team system (which includes the Defense Attaché Office and the Security Assistance Organization), the American Embassy, public affairs officer, United States Information Service, and geographic combatant commands.”<sup>20</sup>

In MOOTW, it is almost certain that the U.S military will be interacting with International Government Organizations (IGOs) (e.g. United Nations, North Atlantic Treaty Organization, Organization of African Unity), NGOs (e.g. American Red Cross, Amnesty International) and PVOs (e.g. Doctors without Borders). In the 1990s, and continuing today, international and intra-state strife has spawned conflicts which compelled international intervention. In the case of a humanitarian relief effort, the U.N. High Commission for Refugees and other IGOs and NGOs might rely on logistical support from U.S. military units, or in the case of a U.N. peace operation, the U.S. military and civilian agencies might join forces to provide long-term support to the operation.<sup>21</sup> Regardless, the nature of these activities and the complexity of the command and control structure, where no one entity is “in charge” of all, places a strain on the U.S. military units which are tasked to engage --

The stage on which these organizations and forces must operate is typically crowded, not only with warring factions and hard-pressed local populations but also with a multi-faceted cast of foreign entities – other militaries, IGOS, and NGOs; diplomats and aid workers from national governments; private individuals and foundations – that are likewise working to alleviate suffering and restore peace. Despite their broadly similar objectives, however, cooperation between

these third parties is by no means inevitable. There are numerous activities that such cooperation can facilitate: policing, security, refugee resettlement, physical reconstruction, transportation, the provision of food, shelter, and health services, and so on. Yet, establishing cooperative relations among the various external players is one of the most challenging aspects of the international response to conflict and disaster.<sup>22</sup>

In order to be effective in these situations and minimize the potential for hostility towards U.S. military presence, the geographic Combatant Commanders' planning staffs must understand the authorities, roles, and capabilities of the other players and develop coordination and communication methods with them.<sup>23</sup> It is important that they know which NGOs and PVOs operating within their AOR are involved in which activities, including education, technical projects, relief activities, refugee assistance, public policy, and development programs.<sup>24</sup> These might form a basis or link for the development of FDOs which counter adversarial propaganda.

History has shown us that the complexion of these activities can change rapidly:

“In situations where religious, socioeconomic, or political divisions are long-standing, animosities often run very deep and violence can erupt at a moment's notice. Belligerent parties may not only attack each other but also target outsiders, be they civilians or soldiers...A show of strength can help defuse tense situations...though it can also tempt extremists on one or both sides to test the resolve of the intervening force or to create conditions that discredit the force's presence.”<sup>25</sup>

NGOs' and PVOs' ability to rapidly engage and the flexibility in their engagement strategies “can lessen the civil-military resources that a commander would otherwise have to devote to an operation.”<sup>26</sup> Factoring in the activities and capabilities of NGOs and PVOs into the geographic Combatant Commanders' planning staff's assessment of conditions and resources provide more options in the development of FDOs. “Their [NGOs and PVOs] extensive involvement, local contacts, and experience in various

nations make these organizations valuable sources of information about local and regional governments as well as civilian attitudes toward the operation.”<sup>27</sup> This is information that could prove critical in countering adversarial propaganda.

## **Recommendations**

The construction of FDOs to counter anti-U.S. propaganda is a practice of operational art. Each geographic Combatant Commander will be dealing with unique, and potentially volatile, situations within their AOR caused by anti-U.S. propaganda. To deal with these situations, the geographic Combatant Commanders’ planning staffs will need to identify the conditions which must be produced to counter the propaganda; the sequence of events likely to produce the desired results; the resources required; and, the likely costs and risks involved.<sup>28</sup> The strategic goal, essentially winning the hearts and minds in the AOR and international community, is not a traditional military focus and this brings a high degree of difficulty to the playing field. This is why other USG agencies/organizations must be involved in the planning and execution of the FDOs. The core competencies of each participant must be recognized and brought to bear to counter the anti-U.S. propaganda and protect U.S. national interests.

In countering anti-U.S. propaganda, it is critical to understand that it requires more than a defensive Information Operations (IO) campaign. Efforts to project

the U.S. "message" have been underway since the American Revolution and continue today. For example, after Kosovo, Presidential Decision Directive (PDD) 68, International Public Information, directed the establishment of an interagency group to counter the propaganda of U.S. adversaries. It was to "synchronize the information objectives, themes and messages that will be projected overseas...to prevent and mitigate crises and to influence foreign audiences in ways favorable to the achievement of U.S. foreign policy objectives."<sup>29</sup> While the message is important and the State Department is the obvious choice to project it, the geographic Combatant Commander also needs to take *actions* which address cultural, psychological, economic, technological, informational, and political factors in the AOR as well as transnational dangers.<sup>30</sup> Note the emphasis on actions. Words without actions to back them will have little to no impact on the target audience. Development and execution of FDOs which counter anti-U.S. propaganda as part of a proactive theater engagement strategy must contain tangible activities if they are to succeed in changing the AOR's security environment.

As a start in developing FDOs to counter anti-U.S. propaganda, a geographic Combatant Command's planning staff needs to work, through the geographic Combatant Command's Political Advisor, with the chiefs of U.S. diplomatic missions in their theater. The first concern will be to identify where compatibility of U.S. and AOR



nations interests exists; build on those mutual national interests; and, address mutual security concerns against real and perceived threats. The State Department's expertise in the laws, culture, politics, religions, and languages of regional actors<sup>31</sup> and the fact that it is also "frequently the lead Federal agency and nearly always a principal player in joint MOOTW outside the continental United States"<sup>32</sup> makes its input critical to the development of FDOs to counter adversarial propaganda. Other USG agencies/organizations may also need to be involved. For example, the Department of Commerce might have input on courses of action which involve U.S. foreign trade and economic policies or the U.S. AID may already have projects underway in theater.

A common theme in Joint doctrine is that the synchronization of U.S. military and civilian activities is critical to achieving success in MOOTW. The U.S. military possesses the planning and execution capabilities to "develop and execute swift, large-scale operations to support elections, distribute food and humanitarian relief items, build and repair infrastructure, assist with refugee relocation, and conduct a host of other operations"<sup>33</sup> for humanitarian and peace keeping missions. In the civil-military coordination of these missions, unity of effort demands that the activities and capabilities of NGOs and PVOs be factored into the commander's assessment of conditions and resources and integrated into the concepts of operation.<sup>34</sup> This holds true also for developing FDOs to counter adversarial propaganda. IGOs, NGOs, and PVOs are in the AORs for the long-haul. Finding ways to assist them with their projects (e.g. logistics help, engineering expertise) may help build mutual understanding and trust. These organizations can play a role in combating anti-U.S. propaganda through their connections to the local population and international community. However, geographic

Combatant Commands must understand that NGOs and PVOs operate under different rules of engagement and need to protect their neutrality. For these reasons, the Combatant Commands' planning staffs might be better served to work out the official coordination, communication, standard operating mechanisms through the State Department or other USG agencies/organizations which are used to dealing with many of these entities.

There is also a large pool of expertise within the Department of Defense (DoD) which may not be fully utilized by the geographic Combatant Commands' planning staffs. Civil affairs, medical, and psychological operations (PSYOPS) personnel, with their capability to forge relationships in theater, also bring a valuable asset to military planning when developing FDOs to counter adversarial propaganda. The indigenous population is interested in actions not words. FDOs which include improving infrastructures, providing medical care, building schools, and so on, will make inroads to "winning the hearts and minds" of the AOR populace (remember the Hizbollah lesson) and potentially deny sanctuary to adversaries and refute their anti-U.S. propaganda. As long as the U.S. national strategy calls for the U.S. military's forward presence, thought has to be given to how to minimize the perception of "occupation" and build support for their presence in theater. Civil-Military Operations Centers (CMOC) have served to improve communication and coordination between U.S. military and civilian agencies, as well as, IGOs, NGOs, PVOs, and local populations during combat and humanitarian/peacekeeping operations.<sup>35</sup> This construct might be a vehicle to consider for day-to-day, in theater, operations to foster closer coordination and cooperation.

There are those who would argue that the role of the U.S. military is to be a fighting force. This is true. However, as long as it is U.S. national policy to have a forward presence, the reality is that the forces in theater become the codification of U.S. plans and intentions to a foreign audience. The geographic Combatant Commander is no longer the solution for when diplomacy fails, he is now part of the answer for why diplomacy succeeds. The importance of this role is recognized in Joint publications dealing with a wide range of topics (e.g. multinational, peace and interagency operations). It must now be recognized in practice.

## **Conclusion**

“Prudent use of military forces in peacetime helps keep the day-to-day tensions between nations or groups below the threshold of armed conflict and maintains US influence in foreign lands. Such operations include foreign humanitarian assistance (FHA) and disaster relief, nation assistance (to include security assistance, foreign internal defense (FID), and foreign consequence management (CM)), counterdrug operations, arms control, evacuation of noncombatants, and peacekeeping. Such operations are typically joint in nature and may involve forward-presence forces or units deployed from another theater or the continental United States (CONUS) or a combination of both.”<sup>36</sup>

The world continues to change dramatically. As the common threat of the USSR disappeared, the perceived need for U.S. protection by Allies and neutrals diminished causing alliances to loosen and coalitions to fragment.<sup>37</sup> “If the Cold War was at times described as an international civil war, so the progressive multipolarization of conflict among diverse claimants to power make this designation even more apt...It is in such turmoil that terrorism flourishes, weapons proliferate, respect for political boundaries

diminishes, and moral or legal restraints, always fragile, steeply erode.”<sup>38</sup> For this reason, shaping the theater environment, especially to counter anti-U.S. propaganda, is even more critical today. It must be a long-term effort involving the synchronization of all the tools of national power because the U.S. military does not stand alone in the battlespace. The geographic Combatant Command is reliant on the core capabilities of other USG agencies/organizations responsible for activities in its theater of operations, as well as, those of IGOs, NGOs and PVOs.

The US military’s partnership with the US State Department, its close relations to the armed forces of countries around the world, and a growing familiarity with the international relief community have helped the United States conduct its foreign policy efficiently and have contributed to the success of the military’s operations. The capacity to function successfully as a team in complex, multicultural settings is an important development in the military’s ability to support US foreign policy objectives.<sup>39</sup>

In the current U.S. military planning structure, it appears the vehicle with the best chance of success for exploring and developing interagency options for countering anti-U.S. propaganda in theater is the FDO process. There are problems, however, in the engagement mission which need to be addressed. Theater Strategic Capabilities Plans (formerly Theater Engagement Plans (TEPs)) provide the geographic Combatant Commander with a strategy to support their Prioritized Regional Objectives (PROs). They connect engagement with “the ability of the U.S. military to promote

regional stability, deter aggression and coercion and prevent or reduce conflicts.”<sup>40</sup> Using FDOs to counter anti-U.S. propaganda ties to all three of these. Impediments exist, however, to using the FDO process to achieve them. They include the disparity between geographic Combatant Commands’ TEPs:

“For example, USEUCOM’s TEP is highly detailed and is based on regional, subregional, and country objectives that are associated with approximately 5000 annual activities. By contrast, USCENTCOM’s TEP is based on 15 strategic theater objectives, five of which relate to engagement;”<sup>41</sup>

difficulty in achieving unity of effort across the geographic Combatant Commands; resolution of conflicting priorities with other U.S. agencies; problems of incorporating programs resourced by other federal agencies which operate independently of DoD planning and programming processes; and, resource (manpower and funding) limitations of the geographic Combatant Commands’ planning staffs.<sup>42</sup> Many of these problems are being addressed through transformation efforts. It remains to be seen how successful they’ll be.

The U.S. military must be able to swiftly defeat the effort and/or win decisively when called into combat. That fact has not changed. Increasingly, however, the geographic Combatant Commander is involved in MOOTW where theater security is affected by anti-U.S. propaganda. Consequently, the traditional role of the U.S. soldier has evolved to one beyond warfighter as noted in an Australian Department of Defense poster published in 1994. It showed an Australian Special Forces soldier, serving in the

Rwandan humanitarian peace operation, holding the hand of a Rwandan child. The caption read “Ambassador, Teacher, Soldier, Peacekeeper.”<sup>43</sup> This aptly illustrates the evolving complexity of the military’s role. Whether or not the U.S. military is comfortable with this evolution, its forward presence in theater mandates that the geographic Combatant Commander use all available national resources to counter anti-U.S. propaganda so as to keep U.S. military combat action as a true “last resort.”

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## ENDNOTES

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